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SUBJECT: GABON'S SCHOOLS FAIL END OF YEAR EXAMS

¶1. Few of Gabon's students passed their exams this year: only 17% of students completing ninth grade succeeded in the entry exam for secondary school (BEPC), and just 35% of secondary students passed the baccalaureat exam, equivalent to a high school diploma. Gabon's results are much worse than those of neighbor Cameroon, where 59% of students passed the baccalaureat.

¶2. No one was surprised that Gabon's students did poorly, since that is an annual occurrence, but the results of the BEPC were even worse than expected. The blame for this performance is distributed widely. Those generally held responsible include:

- Politicians who appoint school officials based on ethnic or family ties, rather than competence;
- School officials who seek to enrich themselves rather than enhance their institutions;
- Teachers who give passing grades to failing students for pay, or because of ethnic ties;
- Parents, who ignore the education of their offspring or offer teachers bribes for good grades; and
- Students who don't take their studies seriously.

¶3. Minister of Education Albert Ondo Ossa, appointed in 2005, is generally considered serious and has pledged fundamental reform. He plans to begin by reducing spending on enormously costly scholarships for Gabonese students to study overseas; this currently absorbs almost \$90 million per year. Redeploying some of these funds into the secondary school system will be easier than increasing accountability of officials, teachers, parents and students.

WALKLEY